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Daily Highlights

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TUESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Under-Secretary-General for Peace-Keeping says United Nations has learned lesson of withdrawal, not retreat from its Somalia operation; stresses limits to international community's patience and resources.

+ UNHCR expresses grave concern for civilians in Bihac pocket; food convoys into area still blocked; Secretary-General appeals to both sides to show restraint.

+ Croatian Government expresses interest in keeping UNPROFOR headquarters in Zagreb even if its troops leave at end of March.

+ Disarmament Conference hears call to correct the imperfections and imbalance of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and make it an instrument also favouring peaceful use of nuclear energy.

+ Economic and Social Council recommends its 1996 organizational session adopt issue of international cooperation against drugs as theme of its high-level segment next year.

+ Inter-regional meeting in Bratislava calls for efforts to sustain momentum generated by International Year of Family; affirms Year's success in raising awareness of family issues and generating action.

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One of the major lessons the United Nations had learned as a result of the Somalia operation was to withdraw -- and by that he did not mean retreat, Kofi Annan, the Under-Secretary-General for Peace-Keeping Operations said today. Mr. Annan was briefing correspondents at Headquarters on the final pullout of the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM II) which will be completed by 6 March -- three weeks ahead of schedule. Mr. Annan said the decision to leave Somalia had been deliberate and painful, but given the number of crises around the world, the Security Council felt compelled to let the protagonists know there was a limit to the international community's

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patience and resources. The reponsibility for political compromise and national reconciliation finally lay with the leaders and people concerned. The world community could only facilitate, encourage and assist, not impose or coerce peace.

Mr. Annan said another lesson learned in Somalia was that the traditional peace-keeping guidelines of impartiality and neutrality were still valid, even in a police action. Once an operation was perceived as an effort to change the military balance or give an advantage to one side, peace-keepers could be attacked. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the United Nations was walking the thin line of impartiality by trying to carry out its mandate and not be seen as taking sides, so preventing undue casualities and calls to "bring the boys home". Maintaining that very delicate line was a tough one for the Commanders to keep.

Although Somalia had been a difficult mission which did not attain all the Council's objectives, much had been achieved, Mr. Annan said. Lives had been saved, a famine ended and in many parts of the country people had resumed normal lives with the establishment of local government institutions and the improvement of education and health facilities. The Organization would continue its diplomatic efforts to bring the Somali factions together and the Agencies and non-governmental organizations would pursue their humanitarian programmes in parts of the country where security conditions permitted. To deal with the current volatile situation, they had already devised a flexible approach allowing them to operate from Nairobi.

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As fighting continued around the Bihac pocket in north-west Bosnia and Herzegovina, today, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) expressed grave concern for civilians there, especially those in the Bosnian Government controlled southern parts of the area. A UNHCR spokesman said certain vulnerable sections of the population would be gravely affected if the Bosnian Serb blockade of the area continued. The Agency had hoped to bring a food convoy into Bihac but had not yet received clearances from the Bosnian Serb side, despite their verbal and written assurances.

Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has sent letters to Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic and Bosnian Serb leader, Dr. Radovan Karadzic expressing concern at the fighting and has urged restraint on both sides, according to a United Nations spokesman.

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The Croatian Government has expressed interest in keeping the headquarters of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in Zagreb if and when its troops leave at the end of March, according to a spokesman for the Organization. UNPROFOR's Force Commander, General Bertrand de Lapresele was given word of the Croatian interest today, when he met with a senior cabinet level Croatian official. General de Lapresele informed the official that the decision would be made by the Security Council and Secretary-General

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Boutros Boutros-Ghali in light of developments after 31 March and that their decision would be based on practicality, efficiency and effectiveness.

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Algeria has called for steps to correct the imperfections and imbalance of the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Addressing the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, Mohamed Salah Dembri, the Algerian Minister for Foreign Affairs, called for the nuclear States to take decisive disarmament measures. He said the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the NPT should not only focus on the extension of the Treaty, but should also reflect on ways in which to make it an instrument that truly favoured nuclear energy for peaceful use.

Mr. Dembri said that threats to the stability of certain regions, the rise and exacerbation of ethnic and religious intolerance, as well as terrorism, had added to former unsettled situations created by the stockpiling of considerable amounts of arms, including weapons of mass destruction. Germany's representative warned that failure to re-establish the ad hoc committee on effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or the threat of use of nuclear weapons could send a wrong signal in view of the forthcoming nuclear test-ban conference.

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The Economic and Social Council has strongly recommended that its 1996 organizational session adopt the issue of international cooperation against illicit narcotics and psychotropic substances as a theme for its high-level segment next year. The draft resolution sponsored by the Philippines, on behalf of the "Group of 77" developing countries and China would have the Council decide, instead of recommend, the high-level consideration of the issue in 1996.

Speaking after the draft's adoption, the representative of Venezuela said he would have preferred more precise language stating how the Council would consider that issue. The representative of Mexico, supported by the United States, expressed concern that the Council had not been able to follow recommendations contained in two General Assembly resolutions requesting high-level consideration of the illicit drugs issue. There was inconsistency concerning Assembly recommendations, he added.

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The United Nations Inter-regional Meeting of National Coordinators and Focal Points for the International Year of the Family has called for the establishment of national mechanisms to ensure continued action on family issues. Concluding a four-day meeting in Bratislava, Slovak Republic, participants declared that the Year (1994) had a major impact in raising awareness of family issues and had generated action all around the world. They called on Governments to undertake concerted long-term efforts to sustain

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the momentum. The Meeting was convened by the secretariat for the Year in order to assess national experience with the Year's programme and consider follow-up activities.

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Participants reaffirmed that the Year had underscored the pivotal importance of families to the development process, as well as their multi-faceted roles for the well-being of individuals and families in all societies, despite diverse concepts of the nature and function of families. They called for measures to ensure the widest possible observance of the International Day of Families (15 May), the United Nations Year for Tolerance (1995) and the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations. There were also calls for attention to be given to family issues in preparations for next month's World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen and the Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held in Beijing in September.

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